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CBC Newsletter

ISSN No. 0162-7120

For members of the Carolina Bird Club, Inc., Ornithological Society of the Carolinas

Volume 58 October 2012 Number 5

Winter Meeting Migrates to the Outer Banks

Ron Clark

The CBC 2013 Winter Meeting originally scheduled to be held along North Carolina's Central Coast will now be held along the famous Outer Banks. The dates remain the same, January 25-26, so pencil it in on your calendar now!

The Outer Banks and winter! This combination is easily one of the best birding experiences in the state. Last time we were there we finished with 186 species. The numbers included twenty-four species of duck, six of rails, five types of owls, nineteen flavors of shorebirds, 11 of those sometimes-confusing gulls, and an even dozen sparrows. There were American Bitterns in the ditch along Highway 12, and Dovekies and Razorbills put on a show from shore at Cape Point. Our species list was graced with Ross's Goose, Cackling Goose, Swainson's Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk and Iceland Gull. A Sora made many friends as it scurried around under the feeder at the Pea Island Visitor's Center. We can hope for these as well as species like Eurasian Wigeon, Golden Eagle and Brant that are rare or uncommon in the Carolinas, but not infrequent visitors to Outer Banks and Coastal Plain of North Carolina.

We'll be staying at the Comfort Inn South on Old Oregon Inlet Road in Nags Head. This property was just completely refurbished, with new paint, carpet, furniture and flat screen televisions. All rooms have microwave, refrigerator and internet. Oceanfront rooms with one king or two doubles are $65 plus tax. Other rooms with one queen or two doubles are $55, plus tax. Included is a hot breakfast buffet, served in a room just for our meeting participants. For reservations, call 252-441-6315. Be sure to tell them you're with the Carolina Bird Club in order to get the special rate.

There will be many field trips to all the hot spots in the area. Many Carolina birders are familiar with Oregon Inlet, Pea Island, and Cape Hatteras Point. These locations will be well represented in the field trip lineup as will others like Lake Mattamuskeet, Pocosin Lakes NWR, Bodie Island, Pine Island Audubon Sanctuary and Roanoke Island. We are also hoping to offer a pelagic trip with Brian Patteson. If you have not been offshore in the winter, a treat awaits. The juxtaposition of winter species like alcids and fulmars alongside blue water species like possible Black-capped Petrel is an amazing experience.

For non-birding spouses the Outer Banks offer many diversions. From the Wright Brothers Memorial to historic Manteo, from lighthouses to the Elizabethan Gardens, from serene beaches to eclectic shops, there is something for everyone.

Be sure and catch the next Newsletter for all the details and field trips. It's the best time to be at the Outer Banks. The birds are numerous, the crowds are not, the prices are lower, and you'd be hard-pressed to find a mosquito! Add to that all of our great members, and it looks to be a fun-filled weekend. We hope to see you there.

CBC Newsletter (USPS# 023-534), October 2012, Volume 58, Number 5. Published bimonthly by the Carolina Bird Club, Inc., 6236 Teal St., Unit 8-D., Wilmington, NC 28403. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to *CBC Newsletter*, Carolina Bird Club, Inc., 6236 Teal St., Unit 8-D., Wilmington, NC 28403.

THE YEARS BEFORE THE CAROLINA BIRD CLUB; THEN AND NOW

Dr. Edmund Rhett Taylor

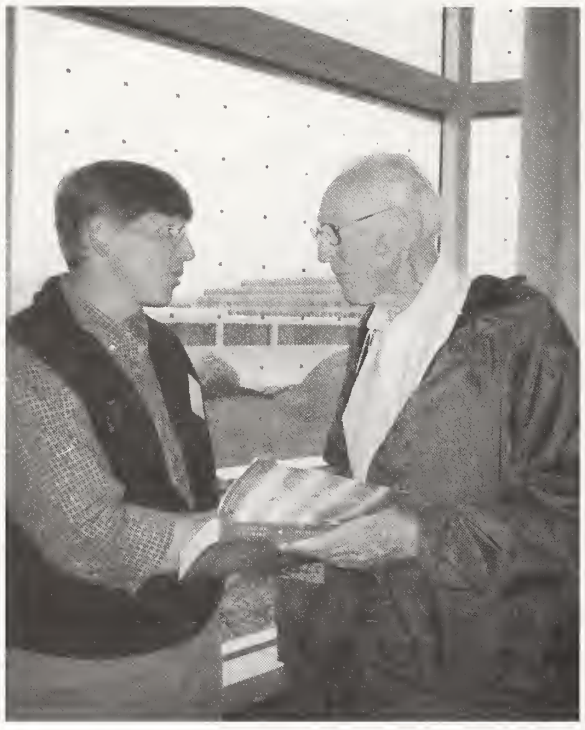
As a 96 year-old ornithologist who attended the sprightly 75th anniversary of the Carolina Bird Club in Raleigh, I decided to pen a note about yesteryear in that bird haven, Chapel Hill, where one of the many 2012 field trips was held. I was born into birding, and spent my formative years in Chapel Hill. My father, George Coffin Taylor, was a Shakespearean and English professor at the University of North Carolina. He was raised in Columbia, SC, where he and his cousins collected bird eggs and shot robins and waxwings with slingshots. Gratefully these habits have stopped, and people today can get a close look at birds through binoculars, telescopes, and cameras. I inherited the family egg collections, including carefully labeled and dated eggs over a hundred and fifty years old.

Seeing father's egg collection was the beginning of a lifelong fascination with birds, and I spent many hours of my youth combing the fields and woods of Chapel Hill in search of them. Bolin Creek was a favorite destination. Then it was a remote deserted series of meadows and trees teeming with endless variety especially during migration. In the thirties, all the woods rang with the liquid song of thrushes. It was glorious birding, but in those days when relatively few people were interested in birds, we simply took it for granted.

At the age of fourteen, i.e. around 1930, I landed a job as an assistant in zoology at U.N.C. under the mentorship of Dr. James Manson Valentine. As both a high school student and later as an undergraduate assistant in Zoology at U.N.C., I collected and stuffed birds to add to the fine collection of skins given by Dr. Valentine to the University of North Carolina.

In about 1932, my father was out of the country on sabbatical and our family lived in Charleston with my aunt. I was taken on trips to heron colonies with Milby Burton and E.B. Chamberlain to band birds. Alexander Sprunt took us on tours of Bull's Bay Marshes, which were teeming with hundreds of shorebirds.

In about 1938, four of us sons of professors including Coit Coker, Arnold Breckenridge, and Eugene Odum, published The Birds of Chapel Hill, in the *Journal of the Elisha Mitchell Scientific Society,* now the *Journal of North Carolina Academy of Science.* Dr. Eugene Odum, our leader, became a prominent environmentalist at the University of Georgia.



At age 96, Dr. Edmund Taylor has heard thousands of talks on a wide variety of topics. He says that Scott Weidensaul's beautifully illustrated CBC talk on bird migration is the finest he's ever heard and seen.

I chose to join the spring 2012 CBC field trip along Bolin Creek where I used to roam in the 1930's. I was struck with how much has changed. Now some 82 years later, it is a dense forest of hardwoods probably 90 feet tall. Houses have been squeezed into the valley down one side and up another, and city noise is constant. The migrants were quiet. In those three hours of our field trip, one Orchard Oriole sang, one Northern Parula warbler, and one Pine Warbler. The Wood Thrush song was conspicuously absent, so I asked our guide about them As I did so, one must have heard me, because he began to pour forth his beautiful lay.

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Then and Now

Dr. Edmund Rhett Taylor

I've always loved Thoreau's quote about the Wood Thrush song:

> *Whenever a man hears it, he is young and nature is in her spring; wherever he hears it, it is a new world and a free country, and the gates of heaven are not shut against him.*

The thrush's song inspired the poet Gerard Manly Hopkins to write:

> *And thrush through the echoing timber*
> *Does so rinse and ring the ear*
> *It strikes like lightening to hear him sing.*

Turn now to Scott Weidensaul's beautifully illustrated talk, the finest I've ever heard and seen. He mentioned that the first of May brings great waves of birds. It did so when I was young and was accompanied by a great cacophony of hundreds of voices ringing throughout the woods. But on my recent Bolin Creek day the chorus was gone. With this silence came a wave of great sadness for the stillness, which has enveloped our magnificent and marvelous continent.

However, there are many positive forces working for our feathered friends. Many millions of birds remain, encouraging birders across the globe. Bird clubs like the Carolina Bird Club promote conservation and interest in the environment along with birding. Extensive research in bird behavior is being carried out by Scott Weidensaul and others who report and share their findings with others. The land trust movement is going strong, helping people like me put land holdings under conservation easements for the protection of wildlife and habitat. In Columbia, South Carolina, our Congaree Land Trust has over 32,000 acres under protection.

I look forward to future CBC meetings and field trips, and will watch with great interest the efforts of our membership as they continue to support and promote this great gift of creation, our birds.

Edmund R. Taylor, a retired surgeon, birding with the Carolina Bird Club at Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina.

CBC Publications Online!

The most recent editions of the Newsletter and The Chat are online on the CBC website. All CBC members will use the same username and password to access these publications. The username is "**member**" and the password is "**birdfun**". This is a membership benefit, please don't share the password with non-members! The password will be changed from time to time, but can always be found in the most recent print edition of the Newsletter.

Go to http://www.carolinabirdclub.org/newsletter to access the Newsletter, and http://www.carolinabirdclub.org/chat to access The Chat.

CBC Does Florida!

Merrill Lester

Cheeseburger in paradise time! A birding exploration of Southern Florida as experienced through the varied influences of Jimmy Buffett, Carl Hiaasen, and even Marjorie Stoneman Douglas. Not the usual snowbirds found in these parts, our group was led by Bruce Smithson, assisted by Stacy Smaltz, and with lucky participants Debbie McGuinn, Dave Robbins, MaryAnn Kolb, Linda Kolb, Pru Williams, Linda Jones, Judi Durr, Cornelia Carrier, Jeff Kline, John Bonestell and yours truly, Merrill Lester.

We arrived in Fort Lauderdale in time for some afternoon birding along with some intermittent and non-deterrent, light showers. First, we headed for Bill Baggs S.P. for a shot at the La Sagra's Flycatcher, which, as it turned out, was last seen the day before! However, we did pick up Black-whiskered Vireo and Gray Kingbird along with some other good starter birds, including Common Ground-Dove. Next, we headed for Green Cay, a recently reconstituted wetlands with a nice boardwalk. Everybody loved the setting and the birds, including Limpkin and an up close and unconcerned, Least Bittern.

While a little breezy at times, the rest of our trip turned sunny and mild - Florida at its best! The next day, we worked our way north of Lake Okeechobee and on over to the Naples area for our overnight. We spent the next morning at Tiger Tail beach on Marco Island. A lovely white beach with fresh air blowing off the Gulf pushing lazy, early morning clouds in an otherwise clear, bright sky. In the afternoon, we headed back east along the Tamiami Trail to Florida City.

Along our drive for the two days we managed to avoid the alligator wrestling stops and opted out of the air-boat rides while experiencing such highlights as: Snail Kite, Crested Caracara, Florida Scrub-Jay, "Great White Heron" (the white morph of the Great Blue Heron), several Swallow-tailed Kites, Burrowing Owl and Mangrove Cuckoo.

Florida City became our base for two days as we first explored parts of the Everglades. We encountered no slithering pythons, but did find some feathered friends, both old and new, such as Roseate Spoonbill, Stilt Sandpiper, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Shiny Cowbird, fledgling Barred Owls and even American Crocodile. Another great trip find at the end of our day of birding was the 'Robert is Here' fruit stand and his terrific fresh-fruit milkshakes! The following day found us in Miami in search of some exotics. In addition to various warblers and other more familiar migrants, we located Mitred Parrot, Common Myna and Red-whiskered Bulbul. We also met some mighty tolerant and helpful people at an otherwise private tennis club

Florida Scrub-Jay
Note the bands on both legs.

in a relatively quiet residential area, an oasis in congested Miami. Our later recovery was greatly aided by dinner at a quiet family-run Italian restaurant where we lucked into their 'all you can eat' spaghetti night!

Yet another cool morning found us tracking south through the Florida Keys. A day to enjoy the varied

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CBC Does Florida!

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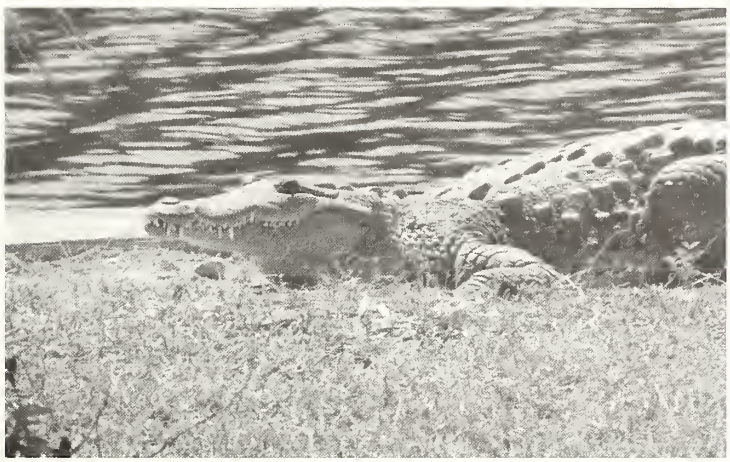
green and blue washes familiar to the sub-tropical sea and sky. Special treats from our various birding stops included White-crowned Pigeon, Key Deer and very few and far between Roseate Terns, easily missed amongst the swarms of Least Terns arriving and departing from the same roof-top nesting sites. Lunch was at the Islamorada Fish Company, with the restaurant built on pilings out over the water, where we enjoyed close boardwalk views of various ocean fish patrolling the shore for dining scraps. Evening twilight found us at the Blue Hole pond on Big Pine Key, settling in to watch the setting sun as well as the various birds (where we missed on a hoped-for sighting of Antillean Nighthawk - but, read on) and animals returning to their nighttime roosts. As dark enveloped us, our hearing became increasingly attuned to the sounds of movement in the tropical foliage by unknown prowlers of the night. However, any residual,



American Crocodile

ancestral nervousness was quickly dissipated upon entering the convivial atmosphere of the No Name Pub, where we enjoyed some seriously good pizza.

Up early again for arguably the biggest day of the trip - our travel by ferry out of Key West to Fort Jefferson of Dry Tortugas birding fame. Our arrival at the fort was heralded by circling Magnificent Frigatebirds. Wasting no time in getting ashore, we first observed Sooty Terns swirling over their nearby nesting site; then, several Brown Noddys resting on pilings close by. Entering the fort, we alternated our explorations between claiming seats by the water feature and strolling around the various shrubs and bushes while observing the many migrants, including warblers, orioles, thrushes and even a Merlin. Our best find inside was easily the eye level perched Antillean Nighthawk!

Also, just as reboarding was beginning, a Black Noddy was spotted. Beginning our run back to Key West, the Captain swung by a small islet where a rather distant view of Masked Booby was obtained. Back at the dock and at the end of a full day, we trooped around the corner and up the stairs to the top deck of Turtle Kraals. Our arrival during happy hour made securing tables a bit adventuresome, but was more than compensated for by great food (and yes, a few beverages of choice) and a relaxed sunset viewing worthy of Margaritaville.

Our last morning of sand, water and sun in cheeseburger paradise began by exploring Fort Zachary Taylor for more migrants. The next stop, just after departing Key West, was at a botanical garden for good views (after a couple of previous shakier sightings) of a dark morph Short-tailed Hawk. The finale of our trip and various birding stops along our way back to Fort Lauderdale was the successful tracking down of a Purple Swamphen; the finale of our eating stops (more than a few of the fast food variety) was at another Italian restaurant, Capriccio, where we were graciously treated to dining atmosphere and food that even the Godfather would have enjoyed - not to mention our somewhat bedraggled but happy crew of *Carolina Birders*!

Bahamas Bound

Steve Shultz

In mid-August I found myself on one of those cruise ships that make quickie weekend trips to the Bahamas. In my particular case I was on *Monarch of the Seas*, a rather elderly, but still well-kept, liner operated by Royal Caribbean International. The largest cruise ship in the world when delivered, the venerable *Monarch* is now dwarfed by nearly every other liner afloat. Relegated to the short-cruise market, *Monarch* plies the waters between Port Canaveral, Florida and Nassau, Bahamas, with a stop at one of the Berry Islands on the way back.

These short Bahamas trips can be rather entertaining for the birder, as the opportunity to take a pelagic trip weds nicely with a visit to two islands sporting vastly different birdlife than that of the Florida peninsula just a bit over a hundred miles to the west.

The most amazing birding event of this trip had to be the nocturnal passerine migration witnessed from the ship. While birds were few and far between during daylight hours (and all species associated with the water), nighttime brought a virtual train of migrants flying south over the brightly-lit liner. We were roughly equidistant between West Palm Beach and Grand Bahama at this point. I would guess that at least 100 birds per hour were passing overhead, and this was just in that one little spot! I could only imagine the number of birds over water that night that were simply just a bit to the east or west, and thus invisible to me.

Most of the time at least one, and often several, birds were in view at any given point. I noticed no migrants before dark, so these appeared to be birds that lifted off from Florida after sunset. I guessed that their across-the-water speed was about 35 m.p.h. (they were easily passing the ship, which was moving at 23-25 m.p.h.) and their altitude was about 200 feet (or 20-30 feet higher than the top deck) although some were cruising along much closer to the water.

From a chaise lounge on the top deck I could look up and, glowing in the lights from the ship, watch as bird after bird appeared behind us, flew overhead, and disappeared into the dark to our south. The birds mostly appeared to be warblers, and if I were somewhat more competent at identifying species by their call notes, I might have been able to get some sense of what species of birds were flying overhead.

The show continued until it was time for me to retire, but I imagine that many hundreds of birds continued to pass overhead during the night.

The next morning brought blue skies and calm seas, allowing good views of a White-tailed Tropicbird that flushed from the water's surface. Later in the day, while relaxing at the British Colonial Hilton's pool area, an Antillean Nighthawk *pitty-pat-pat*'ed overhead, a pair of brightly colored Cuban Grassquits cavorted in the shrubbery, and flights of Gray Kingbirds continually shuttled back and forth.

The next day a morning walk through the native coppice habitat of Little Stirrup Cay revealed some of the warblers that may have been migrating overnight. Black and White and Prairie Warblers, both early migrants, shared the foliage with Western Spindalis, Bahama Woodstar, Thick-billed Vireo, Bananaquit, Black-faced Grassquit and more. A Black-billed Cuckoo provided the biggest surprise.

In short, if you have three nights and a about as much cash as a weekend visit to Myrtle Beach would set you back, a Bahamas cruise might be just the ticket for a fun birding weekend!

Welcome New Members!

The CBC warmly welcomes the following new members.

Marion and Steven Mersch
Concord, NC

Kelley Singer
Hendersonville, NC

Alice and David Johnson
Burnsville, NC

Teresa Saylor
Raleigh, NC

Deceased Member:

Elizabeth Watson,
Life Member

Lynne Mattocks Lucas

Birder's Book Review

Steve Shultz

The Armchair Birder Goes Coastal
John Yow
ISBN 978-0-8078-3561-6, 234 pages, hardcover
2012, The University of North Carolina Press, $26.00

Subtitled *The Secret Lives of Birds of the Southeastern Shore, The Armchair Birder Goes Coastal* is the follow-up to, you guessed it, *The Armchair Birder*. In this sequel our "let the birds come to me versus attempting to go and see them" birder branches out to the coast.

While the author admits that for this book he did indeed have to seek out the birds instead of having them come to him, the rewards include encounters with such brilliant species as Roseate Spoonbill and Black-necked Stilt. Birds that one would likely not encounter with at least a modicum of effort to go and see them.

Each of the twenty-eight species discussed follows generally the same recipe. The author first provides some stage on which he first encounters the bird, and these can be rather entertaining. The rest of the chapter generally consists of quotes from other authors, and this is where I feel the book falls short. I felt that we were simply rehashing statements made elsewhere, without any real additional insight or color. Yes, we look at how the birds fit into their chosen environment and what makes them unique, but it is all information that we've seen before, elsewhere. The book is very much about the behavior of the birds, but in my case I prefer the writings of David Sibley or John Dunne (who does a masterful job injecting humor into what can otherwise be a dry subject).

As is usually the case, your mileage may vary, so feel free to let me know what you think!

Save the Date: Wings Over Water Festival

The 16th annual Wings Over Water Festival, headquartered along North Carolina's scenic Outer Banks, is scheduled for **November 6-11, 2012**. The festival dates are designed to provide insight into the Outer Banks' role in providing a stopover and wintering destination for migratory birds, as well as showcasing the year round opportunities to enjoy nature and wildlife.

The Carolina Bird Club, along with the Coastal Wildlife Refuge Society, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and the Outer Banks Sentinel sponsor this year's edition of the festival celebrating nature and the outdoors.

As in past years, the event features a number of opportunities for birders, photographers, and nature enthusiasts to experience the Outer Banks and mainland areas of eastern North Carolina. Birding trips to famous locations such as Oregon Inlet, Cape Hatteras, Bodie Island Lighthouse, Alligator River NWR, and others are joined by new offerings including a Backcountry 4x4 Expedition, an oceanwatcing trip to Jeanette's Pier, and your chance to participate in a "Big Day".

The Saturday evening keynote speech is scheduled to be presented by artist and illustrator John Sill. You may recognize Sill's work in Massachusetts Audubon Society's Bird Identification Calendar, where he was the illustrator from 1980 through 2007. Sill is also the instructor of the Field Sketching and Bird Illustration Workshop for the Institute for Field Ornithology sponsored by the American Birding Association.

As in past years, the keynote reception will be at the NC Aquarium, offering a chance to commune with the sharks while enjoying dinner and a beverage.

Registration information, including field trip descriptions, fees, and times, is available at the Wings Over Water website: www.wingsoverwater.org, or by calling 252-216-WING(9464). Hope to see you there!

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Upcoming CBC Meetings

Nags Head, NC January 25-26, 2013
Asheville, NC Spring 2013

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The *CBC Newsletter* is published bimonthly by Carolina Bird Club, Inc. Founded in 1937 the membership is open to anyone interested in birds, natural history, and conservation. Current dues are: Individual & non-profit, $25; Associate (in household with individual), $5; Student, $15; Patron, $50 and up; Sustaining & businesses, $30; Life, $400; Associate Life (in household with Life Member), $100 (both Life memberships can be paid in four annual installments). Membership dues of $25 include $4 for a subscription to *CBC Newsletter* and $5 for a subscription to *The Chat*. Cost for CBC bird checklists, including postage: 10@$5.45, 25@$13.40, 50@$27.00, and 100@$54.00. Submit application for membership, change of address, and payment for checklists to: CBC Headquarters Secretary, 6236 Teal St., Unit 8-D, Wilmington, NC 28403. Copyright © 2012.

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